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DENMARK ASKS

IS YOUR ENVIRONMENT HEALTHY?

The environment affects our health in both positive and negative ways. Pollution, chemicals, noise and pathogens can do us harm, while healthy environments for living, working and recreation do us good. The challenge for governments is to improve quality of life for citizens by limiting negative environmental effects on health.

In 2003 the Danish government launched its first strategy for environment and health, outlining goals and initiatives for the coming years and setting out a 10-point plan to limit negative environmental effects on public health. The strategy provides a common framework for strengthened cooperation between authorities involved in future efforts.

“Cleaner environment – healthier Danes”

The government’s action plan focuses on a prioritised set of environmental pollutants and their vectors e.g. air, food, water, and emphasises the importance of research as well as cross-sectoral and international cooperation in ensuring an effective effort.

1. Chemicals

Negative impacts on health from chemicals to be reduced and substitution of hazardous substances by less hazardous ones to be accelerated

2. Allergies

The incidence of allergy and respiratory disorders to be reduced

3. EDCs

Measures directed at endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) to be intensified

4. Noise

Noise nuisances to be reduced

5. Air pollution

Negative impacts on health from air pollution and indoor climate to be reduced

6. Food

Food to be made safe and free from pollution

7. Water

Groundwater and drinking water to be protected

8. Research

Research into the significance of environmental factors on health to be enhanced

9. Local cooperation

Cooperation between the authorities to be strengthened

10. International cooperation

Increased attention to be accorded to environmental factors and health in international cooperation

Progress on a wide front

In the period 2003-2005, efforts have been made across a wide front, including follow-up work on the EU regulation on evaluation and authorization of chemicals (REACH), development work on computer modelling of structure-activity relations of chemicals, noise mapping for large urban areas, roads, railways and airports, analysis of leaching of substances from plastic pipes, research into particulate emissions from diesel engines, and formulating quality thresholds for microorganisms in drinking water.

Future efforts

New elements that will form part of future efforts include a new chemical action plan and an analysis of the health challenges posed by nanoparticles. Environment and health are a target area under the government’s new plan of action for eco-efficient technology published in July 2007.

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CASE

CHEMISTRY FOR TEENAGERS

In spring 2003, the Danish Government published Denmark's first strategy and action plan to protect the public's health against environmental threats. The new strategy emphasised that special efforts would be made to protect vulnerable groups in society such as pregnant women, children and the elderly. Denmark has since implemented several initiatives, one of which is Chemical Days – an educational website targeted at teenagers.

Chemical Days is a website with educational material aimed at 13-15 year olds, developed by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency to provide knowledge about the chemicals that have an impact on both the teenagers themselves in their daily lives, and the environment.

Free service

The website material is suitable for interdisciplinary teaching involving for example chemistry, physics and social studies, and is available free of charge in both Danish and English. Graphically and linguistically, Chemical Days has been designed to appeal to a target group who tend to view chemistry as a heavy and theoretical subject.

Interactive

The website's key page is the interactive teenage room, which features 11 products, including a shampoo and a mobile telephone, that the user can click on. A window then opens with a description of the chemicals that have been used to make the product. The room also has a bookcase with nine

books, comprising information on a number of relevant subjects, and a globe featuring environmentally-related facts on a number of European countries.

Chemical Days comprises:

- Teacher's guide
- 11 teenage cards
- Product pages
- Experiments
- Chemistry quiz
- Cut-out sheet

Through discussion and exercises facilitated by a teacher, teenagers can learn about a range of chemicals and what they are used for. Chemical Days also shows youngsters how to distinguish between the necessary and unnecessary use of chemicals in consumer products, and they can learn also about eco-labelling and EU policy.

The site will be updated in spring 2008 in order to ensure that the latest developments are covered.

www.chemicaldays.com



The website features a quiz and background information on e.g. danger symbols used on products with hazardous substances.



Chemical Days was developed in close cooperation with teachers of 13-15 year olds and tested by students in a Danish school.